

If I Catch It, Can I Eat It?

A Guide to Safe Eating of Fish Caught in Connecticut



STATE OF CONNECTICUT DEPT. OF PUBLIC HEALTH

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Pamphlet Based Upon 2006 Fish Advisory

Background:

Fish from Connecticut's waters are a healthy, low-cost source of protein. Unfortunately, some fish tend to take up chemicals such as mercury and polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs). These chemicals can build up in your body and damage your nervous system. The developing fetus and young children are most sensitive. Women who eat fish containing these chemicals before or during pregnancy may have children who are slow to develop and learn. PCBs can also cause cancer.

This pamphlet provides advice that will help your family avoid these chemicals and eat fish safely.

What Does The Fish Consumption Advisory Say?

The advisory tells you how often you can safely eat fish from Connecticut's waters and from the store or restaurant. In many cases, separate advice is given for the High Risk and Low Risk Groups. The next section will tell you which group you belong to. Advice is given for three different types of fish consumption:

1. Statewide Freshwater Fish Advisory: Most freshwater fish in Connecticut contain enough mercury to cause some limit to consumption. The statewide freshwater advice is that:

- High Risk Group: no more than 1 meal per month
- Low Risk Group: no more than 1 meal per week

2. Advisories for Specific Waterbodies: Certain waterbodies contain fish with higher levels of contaminants than seen elsewhere in the state. These waterbodies include the Housatonic River, parts of the Quinnipiac River, certain lakes, and certain species from Long Island Sound. The chart and map in the center of this pamphlet provides details on safe fish consumption from these waterbodies.

3. Advice for Fish Purchased from the Market: Most fish from the market are healthy to eat and contain essential nutrients such as omega-3 fatty acids. However, there are some fish that contain elevated levels of mercury or PCBs and so should be consumed less or not at all. This pamphlet points out which fish are healthy to eat and which ones to eat less of.

Am I In The High Risk Group?

- You are in the **High Risk Group** if you are a *pregnant woman*, a *nursing mother*, a *woman of childbearing age*, or a *child under the age of 6*.
- If you do not fit into the High Risk Group, you are in the **Low Risk Group**.

***MORE SPECIFIC FACT SHEETS CAN BE OBTAINED BY
CALLING THE CT DPH (860-509-7742), OR BY GOING TO OUR
WEB SITE :***

<http://www.dph.state.ct.us/BCH/eeoh/webfish.htm>

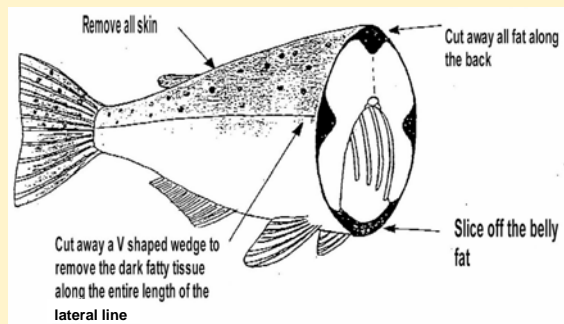
Are Trout Safe To Eat?

Most trout from Connecticut's rivers are safe to eat because they usually have little contamination. However, there are limits on trout from certain waterbodies due to PCBs and on large trout from lakes due to mercury (see chart).

What Else Can I Do To Eat Fish Safely?

PCBs are mostly in the fatty portions of fish. It is very important to remove skin and other fatty parts. Cook fish on a rack (broil) so that fat can drip away from the flesh.

Fatty portions to remove before cooking



Remove and do not eat the organs, head, skin and the dark fatty tissue along the back bone, lateral lines and belly.

Mercury is in the edible (fillet) portion of fish. Therefore, you cannot lower your exposure to mercury by cooking or cleaning the fish. Large fish tend to have the highest levels of PCBs and mercury. If you have a choice, eat smaller fish of any given species. In addition, certain smaller species generally have lower levels of contamination (perch, small trout, sunfish).

How Do These Contaminants Get Into Fish?

Mercury and PCBs can build up in fish to levels that are thousands of times higher than in the water. These contaminants enter the water from:

- Chemical spills that occurred in the past. Even though these spills have been stopped, it will take years for the mercury or PCB levels in the fish to drop to safe levels.
- Mercury in the air. Mercury travels long distances from where it is released. Much of it comes from air pollution outside of Connecticut.

The Connecticut Department of Environmental Protection (CTDEP) is working to improve water quality in Connecticut and is limiting the amount of mercury which can be released into the air.

What About Fish from the Store?

Many fish from the supermarket or restaurant are low in contaminants. Some of these fish are also high in omega-3 fatty acids, a nutrient oil from fish that enhances brain development and helps prevent heart disease. However, some fish from the market can contain elevated levels of contaminants, especially mercury.

In general, people in the High Risk Group should not eat any more than 2 fish meals a week from the market or restaurants. These meals should come from a variety of species, and includes canned tuna. The following are specific tips for those in the High Risk Group to choose healthy fish from the store:

- Canned tuna: Choose "light" tuna because it has less mercury than "white" tuna.
- Lobster and other shellfish are generally low in chemical contaminants. The tomalley portion of lobster (the green gland) can be high in contaminants and should not be eaten. This applies to lobster from Long Island Sound and elsewhere.
- Swordfish and Shark: these contain high levels of mercury and **should not be eaten.**

People in the Low Risk Group can safely eat higher amounts of market seafood. For example, swordfish or shark - once per month; tuna steak or halibut - twice per week.

The Chart below provides general guidance on which fish to choose more often:

Eat More of These	Eat Less or None of These
Haddock	Swordfish **
Sardines	Shark **
Salmon †	King Mackerel**
Atlantic Mackerel	Tilefish**
Flounder	Halibut
Cod	Tuna Steak
Light tuna (canned)	White Tuna (canned)
Pollock	Striped Bass**
Shellfish (oysters, shrimp, clams, scallops, lobster)	Bluefish**

****High Risk Group should not eat any of these species.**

† Salmon: Canned salmon is low in contaminants and so is a good choice. Fresh or frozen salmon fillets are typically from farm-raised fish. These can contain more contaminants than wild salmon and so should be eaten only once per week.

Please call the Connecticut Health Department (860-509-7742) if you would like to know about any fish species not listed in the above chart.

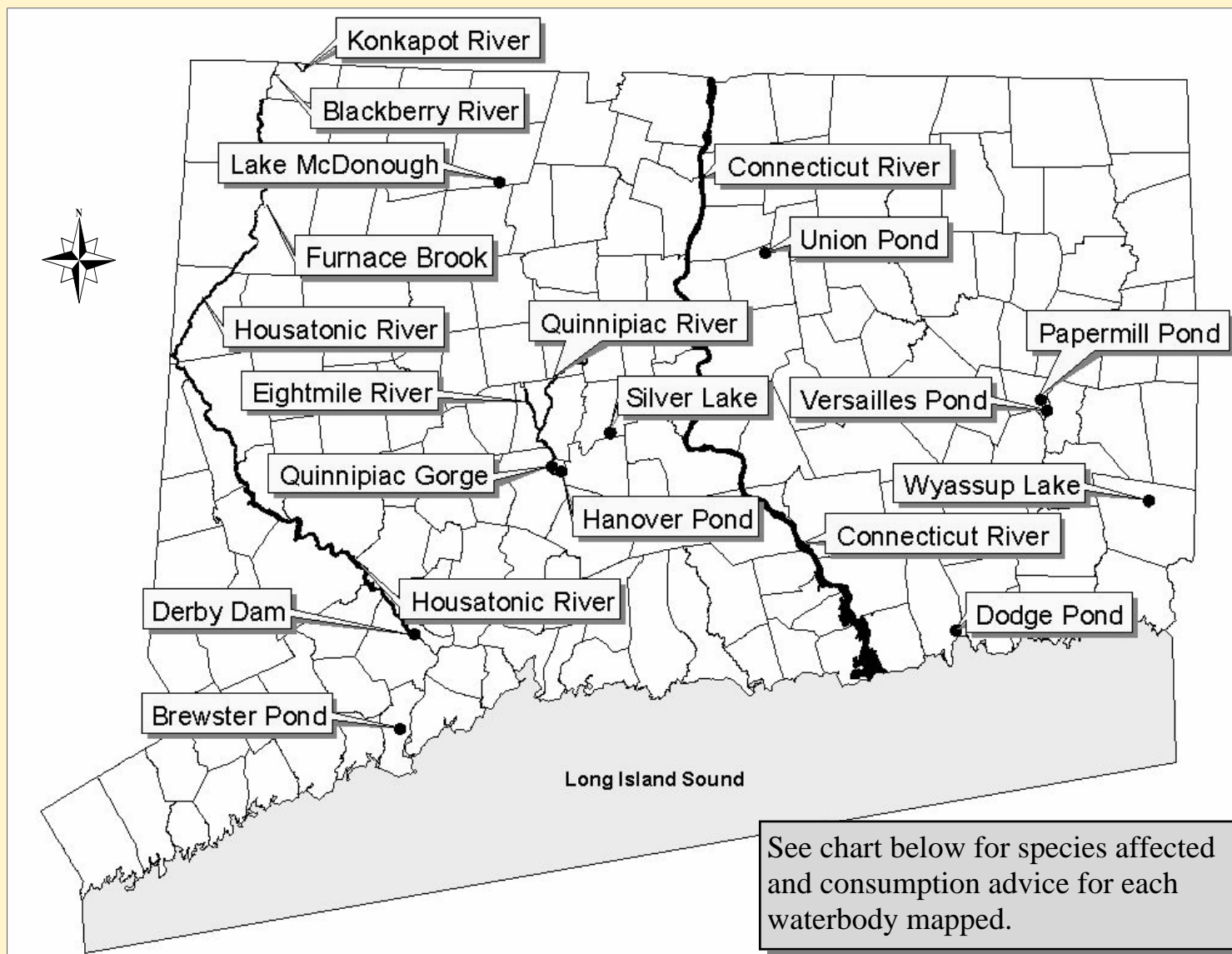
It is important to keep in mind that the High Risk Group should eat no more than 2 fish meals per week, regardless of whether they come from local waters or from the market. This means that if you are in the High Risk Group and have already eaten one locally caught fish meal that week, you should eat only 1 additional fish meal, either from the store or local waters.

Please unfold for more information



Connecticut Safe Fish Consumption Guide

Waterbodies of Specific Concern in Connecticut's 2006 Fish Consumption Advisory
(All other freshwater bodies fall under the general statewide advisory)



2006 Advisory for Eating Fish From Connecticut Waterbodies

REMEMBER

- Follow this advisory to make sure the fish you eat are safe for your family.
- While this advisory focuses on locally caught fish, you should also be selective about store bought fish. See advice on page 3.
- Most trout are not part of the advisory and are safe to eat.
- Long Island Sound*: Most fish are safe to eat except for listed restrictions on Striped Bass and Bluefish.
- The *High Risk* group consists of pregnant women, women planning pregnancy within a year, nursing mothers, and children under age 6.
- The *High Risk Group* should eat no more than one fish meal per month of most freshwater fish. More restrictions apply to fish from certain waterbodies.
- The *Low Risk Group* should limit eating most freshwater fish to once a week.
- Your exposure to PCBs in fish can be further reduced by trimming away fat and cooking fish on a rack so that fat drips away.

WHERE CAN I GET MORE INFORMATION?

Health Questions?

Call CTDPH at 860-509-7742.

Questions about fishing in Connecticut?

Call CTDEP at 860-424-3474.

Advisory Type	Waterbody	Fish Species	High Risk Group ^a Advice	Low Risk Group Advice	Contaminant
Statewide Freshwater Fish	All fresh waterbodies (See more restrictive advice for specific waterbodies listed below.)	Trout	No Limits on Consumption ^b	No Limits on Consumption	- -
		All other fish	One meal per month	One meal per week	Mercury
More Restrictive Advice For Specific Freshwater Fish	Dodge Pond Lake McDonough Silver Lake Wyassup Lake	Largemouth Bass, Smallmouth Bass, Pickerel	Do not eat	One meal per month	Mercury
	Housatonic River above Derby Dam (except as listed below for lakes on Housatonic River)	Trout, Catfish, Eels, Carp, Northern Pike	Do not eat	Do not eat	PCBs
		Bass, White Perch	Do not eat	One meal per 2 months	PCBs
		Bullheads	One meal per month	One meal per month	PCBs
		Panfish ^c (yellow perch, sunfish, etc)	One meal per month	One meal per week	PCBs
	Lakes on Housatonic River: (Lillinonah, Zoar, Housatonic)	Bass, White Perch	One meal per month	One meal per month	PCBs
		Other Species	See advice for river	See advice for river	PCBs
	Furnace Brook (Cornwall)	Trout	One meal per month	One meal per month	PCBs
	Blackberry River Downstream of "Blast Furnace" (North Canaan)	Smallmouth Bass	One meal per month	One meal per month	PCBs
	Quinnipiac River above Quinnipiac Gorge	All Species	Do not eat	Do not eat	PCBs
	Q Gorge/Hanover Pond (Meriden)	All Species	One meal per month	One meal per month	PCBs
	Eight Mile River (Southington)	All Species	Do not eat	Do not eat	PCBs
	Connecticut River	Carp	Do not eat	One meal per 2 months	PCBs
		Catfish	Do not eat	One meal per month	PCBs
	Versailles, Papermill Ponds & connecting section of Little River (Sprague)	All Species	Do not eat	One meal per month	Mercury, PCBs
	Konkapot River (North Canaan)	White Suckers	Do not eat	One meal per month	Mercury
	Brewster Pond (Stratford)	Catfish & Bullheads	Do not eat	Do not eat	Chlordane
	Union Pond (Manchester)	Carp, Catfish, Bass	Do not eat	Do not eat	Chlordane
Specific Saltwater Fish	Long Island Sound and connected rivers	Striped Bass	Do not eat	One meal per 2 months	PCBs
		Bluefish over 25"	Do not eat	One meal per 2 months	PCBs
		Bluefish 13- 25 " ^d	One meal per month	One meal per month	PCBs

^a **High Risk Group** includes pregnant women, nursing mothers, women planning to become pregnant within one year, and children under 6. Low risk group includes all others.

^b It is prudent for the High Risk Group to eat no more than one large trout (over 15") from lakes and ponds per month.

See more restrictive trout advice above for sections of the Housatonic and Quinnipiac Rivers, and other waterbodies.

^c For panfish (yellow perch, sunfish, Pumpkinseed, etc) refer to Statewide Freshwater Fish section above regarding mercury.

^d Snappers, which are bluefish under 13", are not on the advisory because they are not contaminated.